Possible Misreading in 1 Maccabees 7:34 in Light of Its Biblical Model

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First Maccabees 7:34 employs four verbs to describe the offensive speech by Nicanor, the Seleucid general, addressed to the Jewish elders and priests. The third verb indicates that Nicanor defiled his audience. While this has led scholars to associate 1 Maccabees with the Jewish concept of gentile impurity, several factors suggest that, at this point, an error found its way into the Greek translation from the original Hebrew. The present argument comprises three steps. First, I use the biblical Sennacherib story, featured in the background of the Nicanor episode in 1 Maccabees, as a means of reconstructing the relevant original Hebrew verb employed by 1 Maccabees. Second, I suggest a possible misreading of one letter on the part of the Greek translator. Finally, I propose that a similar, earlier verse in 1 Maccabees, 1:24b, may have been conducive to the translator’s commission of this mistake, thus offering an insight into his way of thinking.

I. A VERB CLEARLY OUT OF CONTEXT

First Maccabees 7:34 employs four verbs to describe the insulting nature of the speech by Nicanor, the Seleucid general, directed at the Jewish elders and the priests of the Jerusalem temple who emerged from the temple to greet him: “he mocked them, derided them, defiled them, and spoke arrogantly” (ἐμυκτήρισεν αὐτοὺς καὶ κατεγέλασεν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐμίανεν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφάνως).¹ The third verb, “defile,” plainly differs from the other verbs in this verse: it does not relate to the nature of the speech but rather to a cultic or ritual consequence of some physical act committed by Nicanor. Such an act, however, remains unspecified,²

¹ All translations from Hebrew provided in this article are mine, unless otherwise specified. Translation of Greek verbs is based on LSJ.
² Elia S. Artom speculated that perhaps Nicanor committed a disgraceful act (The Apocryphal Books [Hebrew] [Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1958], 1:48).
and the fourth and final verb (accompanied by an adverb) returns to the description of Nicanor’s speech. At face value, the use here of “defile” would appear to be out of context. The following observations further reinforce this impression:

1. Why would Nicanor constitute a source of defilement? Rabbinic literature, a Jewish corpus with a developed concept of gentile impurity, tells of a figure—variously a king, an Arab, an Arab king, or a foreign ruler—who spoke with a high priest and incidentally spat upon him, rendering him impure and hence temporarily unfit for service. Consequently, in explaining the source of the defilement in 1 Macc 7:34, commentators lean heavily on this story. Yet 1 Maccabees shows little sympathy toward gentiles. It therefore would not have hesitated to refer to

gentile impurity, had it been familiar with the concept. Nevertheless, apart from this proposed, highly incidental reference, 1 Maccabees fails to mention gentile impurity or otherwise indicate its existence. Thus, attributing the concept of gentile impurity to 1 Maccabees appears to be anachronistic.

2. Does the text of 1 Maccabees otherwise support Nicanor’s defilement of the priests and the elders? Christine Hayes noted that in 1 Macc 7:36, only two verses after Nicanor allegedly defiles the priests, the latter return to the temple and pray between the altar and the vestibule, a place accessed only by priests in a state of ritual purity—a clear indication that they had not been defiled.

3. Do other ancient Hebrew versions of Nicanor’s speech support the reading “defile”? The 13th of Adar, commemorating Nicanor’s defeat by the Hasmoneans, is listed in the Scroll of Fasting, a brief listing of happy occasions when fasting is forbidden (hence, Ta’anit, “fasting”) written in Aramaic and dating from the Second Temple period. The list is cited by rabbinic literature and accompanied by a later Hebrew scholion in two recensions, titled Parma and Oxford in modern research. Like 1 Maccabees, Scholion P (Parma) to the 13th of Adar also describes Nicanor’s disparaging speech. It uses three verbs and an adverb: הדורי והמזרח והאירת. The first two verbs, in the present participle, apparently used as synonyms, denote abusive speech: (Nicanor was) “blaspheming and reviling.” The third verb, in the past tense, “spoke,” together with the accompanying adverb, denotes arrogant speech. A parallel reference in the Palestinian Talmud adds to this string another verb—נאץ (“to spurn” or “to slander”)—and thus contains four verbs (in the past tense), exactly as in 1 Macc 7:34: הדורי והאירת והאירת והאירה: (“and he blasphemed and reviled and slandered … spoke in accusation”). Accordingly, the

7 Even Alon, a prominent advocate of a prerabbinic Jewish concept of gentile impurity, was careful to set the terminus post quem for this concept in the middle of the first century BCE, that is, in the later Hasmonean period, several decades after the composition of 1 Maccabees (“Levitical Uncleanliness of Gentiles,” 165, 167, 187). On the dominant opinion that 1 Maccabees dates to the last three decades of the second century BCE, see Rappaport, First Book of Maccabees, 60–61.

8 Hayes, Gentile Impurities, 52. Hannan Birenboim attempts to resolve the conundrum by stating that not all of the priests were defiled (“Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism” [Hebrew], Cathedra 139 [2011]: 8–30, here 18 n. 84).


10 On the word גאיות in the sense of גאוה (“arrogance”), see Vered Noam, Megillat Ta’anit: Versions, Interpretation, History, with a Critical Edition [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 155. For a biblical combination of the verbs זריעה, זריעה, זריעה, and arrogant speech, see Zeph 2:8. Scholion O (Oxford) and b. Ta’anit 18b contain only the arrogant speech of Nicanor in their respective versions of the Nicanor story.

11 Y. Ta’anit 2:13 (66a) // Megillah 1:6 (70c), pp. 717 and 743, respectively, in the Palestinian Talmud edition of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (Jerusalem, 2001). In Megillah 1:3 (70c),
integrated recension of the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting uses at this point the same four verbs and an adverb (denoting arrogance); the first three verbs are present participles and the fourth is in the past tense: "מגאוה בְּדָרָם... לְמַעְנָם המַעְנָם ("and he was blaspheming and reviling and slandering … spoke in arrogance").12

A major difference between the rabbinic versions and 1 Macc 7:34, however, is that in 1 Maccabees Nicanor verbally abuses the priests and elders, whereas the rabbinic versions lack any direct object for his disparagement.

Based on textual analysis of 1 Maccabees and these parallel Hebrew versions of the Nicanor story, Vered Noam identifies two early branches of the story, one shared by 1 Maccabees and the Palestinian Talmud, and the other, represented by Scholion P (and the Babylonian Talmud). The latter, therefore, constitutes an alternative, authentic Hebrew version of the Nicanor story, independent of 1 Maccabees. Relevant to our discussion, both rabbinic versions of the Nicanor speech employ verbs that relate to the abusive nature of the speech and hence reinforce the incongruity of "defile" in 1 Macc 7:34. This conclusion would be further reinforced if indeed an affinity exits between the Palestinian Talmud version and the Hebrew text of 1 Maccabees.

II. The Proposed Thesis

Hayes’s solution was to translate ἐμίανεν in 1 Macc 7:34 as “abused,” and she goes on to explain: "Nicanor 'abused' the priests by mocking them and by blaspheming against them and God's house."14 First, contrary to Hayes’s explanation, no causal relationship exists between ἐμίανεν and the two preceding verbs in this verse, or between it and the following verse (1 Macc 7:35), which contains Nicanor's...
threat to the temple. Second, Hayes does not provide any substantiation for such a possible meaning of μιαίνω. Third, this Greek verb is used on four additional occasions in 1 Maccabees (1:46, 63; 4:45; 14:36), all in the sense of actual defilement (as opposed to the verbal abuse suggested by Hayes). Hence, the question remains: What prompted the Greek ἐμίανεν in 1 Macc 7:34?

I maintain that the third verb in the original Hebrew of 1 Macc 7:34 was probably חַרָף (“to taunt, reproach”), but the Greek translator read it as חַנָּף (qal “to be polluted”; hiphil “to pollute,” mostly by bloodshed). In what follows, therefore, I will discuss the different meaning of these two Hebrew verbs in the relevant context of 1 Macc 7:34. I will first present my argument as to why the Hebrew verb used here may have been חַרָף. Next, I will present the case for a possible misreading on the part of the translator, who, furthermore, may even have been predisposed to read חַנָּף instead. Finally, I will offer my suggestion as to why, in that case, he chose to translate it as μιαίνω.

III. The Biblical Sennacherib Affair as a Clue to the Hebrew Text of 1 Maccabees 7:34

Along with other scholars, I have noted that God’s salvation of Jerusalem in the biblical Sennacherib siege story plays an important role in Hasmonean and post-Hasmonean Jewish literature. The effect of this biblical episode on the Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees (and in its ancient Jewish parallels) is particularly prominent. There is an apparent allusion to this biblical affair in 1 Macc 7:41, as well as

15See also 1 Macc 4:43 (μιασμός in the sense of the Shikutz, i.e., the idol or idolatrous cultic object that was placed in the temple under the persecution), 13:50 (μιᾶςματα in the sense of idols); and Robert Parker, Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 3. Roman Wilk suggests that Nicanor’s words profaned the temple (“The Abuse of Nicanor’s Corpse” [Hebrew], Sidra 8 [1992]: 53–57, here 55 n. 12). The text, however, states explicitly that Nicanor defiled the priests. Furthermore, “to profane” is rendered in 1 Maccabees by βεβηλόω and its derivatives, occurring ten times: 1:43, 45, 48, 63; 2:12, 34; 3:51; 4:38, 44, 54. Note also that 1 Macc 7:42 fails to attach any practical, cultic implication to Nicanor’s subsequent explicit threat to the temple (in 7:35) and sums it up as κακῶς ἐλάλησεν, lit., “he spoke ill” (against the temple).


17In addition to the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting and the Palestinian Talmud, mentioned above, 2 Macc 8:19 and 15:22 also refer to this biblical episode. In fact, Arie van der Kooij observed that the latter reference is a quotation of Isa 37:36 LXX (“The Use of the Greek Bible in II Maccabees,” JNSL 25.2 [1999]: 127–38, here 133).
the display of Nicanor’s right hand in 7:47 (cf. 2 Macc 14:33; 15:30, 32–33)—a clear reference to Isa 10:32. The Isaian verse was accepted in other Judean Hebrew writings of the same period (apart from 1 Maccabees) as a reference to Sennacherib. The analogy to Sennacherib is further accentuated in the Hasmonean context through identification of the Assyrians with the Seleucids.

Against this background, it is probably not a coincidence that the stories of both the biblical Sennacherib and Nicanor contain disparaging speech of the foreign enemy. In other words, it would be reasonable to assume that the author of 1 Maccabees articulated Nicanor’s arrogant and scornful speech in 7:34 based on the arrogant and scornful message of Sennacherib and his emissaries. Thus, the biblical verbs employed to describe the Assyrian speech (in 2 Kings, Isaiah, and 2 Chronicles), may well have been repeated in the original Hebrew text of 1 Macc 7:34. Since my argument involves a Greek translation from Hebrew, attention to the LXX translation of the relevant biblical verbs is warranted.

As shown clearly in the following table, the verb חרטָר is dominant in the biblical Sennacherib story, where it is also employed in conjunction with or even synonymous with גדָּפֶה (see 2 Kgs 19:6 // Isa 37:6), “to revile,” or, following the LXX, “to blaspheme.” Unsurprisingly, חרטָר and גדָּפֶה appear together also in the ancient

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18 As pointed out by Daniel R. Schwartz, 2 Maccabees, CEIL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 62; and Kister, “Back and Forth,” 235; pace Robert Doran, who, based on the difference in language between 2 Maccabees and Isa 10:32, concluded that there is no reference by the former to the latter (2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 280 n. 10). Noam (Shifting Images, 46) suggests that, although 1 Maccabees refers eight times to the Temple Mount as Mount Zion, the occurrence of Mount Zion in 1 Macc 7:33 also echoes Isa 10:32. On “Mount Zion” as the temple in 1 Maccabees, see Goldstein, 1 Maccabees, 278; and David Goodblatt, Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 176.

19 That is, Sir 48:18, and perhaps also Pesher on Isaiah A (4Q161 = 4QpIsaª); see Hanan Eshel, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State, SDSSRL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 97 n. 10. Modern research has proved that this specific prophecy of Isaiah concerns not Sennacherib but rather the campaign of Sargon II against Samaria in 720 BCE; see Shawn Z. Aster, “The Historical Background of the Prophecy in Isaiah 10:28–32” [Hebrew], Judea and Samaria Studies 17 (2008): 25–35.


21 It is also dominant in the biblical episode of David and Goliath (and is likewise translated as ὀνειδίζω in the LXX), which has echoes in the biblical Sennacherib story and in the Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees, as shown by Noam, Shifting Images, 47. On חרטָר and its semantic field in the Bible, see n. 28 below.
Orian: Possible Misreading in 1 Maccabees 7:34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>MT</th>
<th>NEB/NKJV</th>
<th>LXX 2 Kings</th>
<th>LXX Isaiah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 19:4 // Isa 37:4</td>
<td>לחרף</td>
<td>“to taunt,” “to reproach”</td>
<td>ὀνειδίζειν</td>
<td>ὀνειδίζειν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 19:6 // Isa 37:6</td>
<td>נחרם</td>
<td>“blasphemed,” “have blasphemed”</td>
<td>ἔβλασφήμησαν</td>
<td>ὀνειδίζεισαν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 19:16 // Isa 37:17</td>
<td>לחרף</td>
<td>“to taunt,” “to reproach”</td>
<td>ὀνειδίζειν</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 19:22 // Isa 37:23</td>
<td>רוחמה</td>
<td>“you have taunted/reproached and blasphemed”</td>
<td>ὀνειδίσασα καὶ ἔβλασφήμησας</td>
<td>ὀνειδίσασα καὶ παρώξυνας</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 19:23 // Isa 37:24</td>
<td>רוחמה</td>
<td>“you have (sent your servants) to taunt/reproach”</td>
<td>ὀνειδίσασα</td>
<td>ὀνειδίσασα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chr 32:17</td>
<td>לחרף</td>
<td>“to defy,” “to revile”</td>
<td>LXX ὀνειδίζειν</td>
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rabinic parallels to 1 Macc 7:34.22 The verb ὀνειδίζω, however, the LXX equivalent of לחרף in the above table, is absent from 1 Macc 7:34—and from 1 Maccabees as a whole.23 Abraham Kahana, Elia Artom, and Noam suggest that לחרף in the original Hebrew of 1 Maccabees was rendered by a different Greek verb, δυσφημέω ("to speak ill of") and its derivative noun, used in the same chapter 7 of 1 Maccabees:24

22 In the Palestinian Talmud and the integrated recension of the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting, these words are accompanied by a third, similar verb, נאץ ("to spurn" or "to slander"). Indeed, note the noun נאצה in 2 Kgs 19:3 // Isa 37:3.

23 The noun ὀνείδος appears twice (1 Macc 4:45, 58)—both instances in reference to the temple under the persecution—and was translated back into Hebrew as החרפה ("disgrace/reproach") by Kahana (Apocryphal Books, 2:117–18), Artom (Apocryphal Books, 1:31–32), and Rappaport (First Book of Maccabees, 164–65). The noun ὀνείδισμος also appears twice (1:39, 10:70). In 1:39 it was translated back to Hebrew as החרפה ("shame") by Kahana (2:101) and Artom (1:15), and as החרפה by Rappaport (111). In 10:70, ὀνείδισμος appears together with κατάγελως ("derision," the noun derived from the second verb of 1 Macc 7:34, καταγέλαιος): εἰς καταγέλαιον καὶ εἰς ὀνείδισμον, translated by Artom (1:68) as לחרפה ובוז ("into disgrace and contempt") and by Kahana (2:149) and Rappaport (265) by the biblical hendiadys לחרפה ובוז ("an object of scorn and derision"), as in MT Pss 44:15 (LXX: μυκτηρισμὸς καὶ κατάγελος) and 79:4 (LXX: μυκτηρισμὸς καὶ χλευασμός). Compare with MT Jer 20:8 לחרפה והvably ("an object of taunt and derision"); LXX, εἰς ὀνείδισμον ... καὶ εἰς χλευασμόν).

7:41: ἐδυσφήμησαν ("they blasphemed"), a clear allusion to Sennacherib’s emissaries (חֶרֶף)

7:38: δυσφημίαι ("their blasphemies"), referring to Nicanor and his army (חרפים)

The possible use of the verb חֶרֶף in 7:41, in summation of the relevant biblical Assyrian speech, and, more importantly, the possible use of the lexeme חֶרֶף in 7:38, as an intratextual reference to Nicanor’s speech in verse 34, would place further emphasis on the idiosyncrasy of the apparent absence of any Greek equivalent of חֶרֶף from verse 34 itself.

Might any of the other three Greek verbs in 1 Macc 7:34 (leaving ἐμίανεν aside) “represent” חֶרֶף? The fourth verb, with the accompanying adverb, ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφάνως, clearly denotes arrogant speech. The first two verbs—ἐμυκτήρισεν and κατεγέλασεν—stress the jeer in Nicanor’s speech26 and are accordingly translated by a number of scholars.27 True, in the Bible (and as reflected in the NEB translation I


25 The parallel word in 2 Macc 15:24 is βλασφημίαι. See also the reference to Nicanor as ὀβεβηκὼς in 2 Macc 15:32. To complete the picture, notice the single verb (a participle) used by Josephus to paraphrase the entire verse of 1 Macc 7:34: ἐδὲ βλασφημήσας αὐτούς ("he blasphemed them," Ant. 12.10.5 §406), translated by Abraham Schalit as חַרְפוּ (Antiquity of the Jews in Hebrew [Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1944–1963], 3:69). Scholars debate whether Josephus used the Hebrew text of 1 Maccabees alongside its Greek translation; see Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus’ Portrayal of the Hasmoneans," in Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Studies in Memory of Morton Smith, ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers, StPB 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41–68, here 41 n. 3; Étienne Nodet, La crise maccabéenne: Historiographie juive et traditions bibliques, Joséphe et son temps 6 (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 415–23. It should be added that Rappaport also translates the verb in 1 Macc 7:41 as ἐλάλησεν but the plural noun in verse 38 as לְאָמֵן (First Book of Maccabees, 217–18).

26 Compare with the verb ἐμπαίζω ("to mock") in 1 Macc 9:26.


used in the above table), the semantic field of חרה may include “taunt” or “derision” and the like. However, the LXX translates this verb almost exclusively as ὀνειδίζω, thus indicating a dominant understanding of this verb in the Second Temple period as “to reproach.” Note also two other verbs employed in the biblical Sennacherib affair to denote scoffing, in the response of the daughter of Zion to the Assyrians. In fact, the first verb of 1 Macc 7:34, ἐμυκτήρισεν, and the second of these two verbs, are identical:

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 19:21// Isa 37:22</td>
<td>בזה, לעגה</td>
<td>“(she) disdains, laughs you to scorn / (has) despised, laughed you to scorn”</td>
<td>ἐξουδένησεν, ἐμυκτήρισεν</td>
<td>ἐφαύλισεν, ἐμυκτήρισεν</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Thus, the puzzling absence of חרה from 1 Macc 7:34 remains. To sum up the argument so far:

1. The Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees is analogous to the biblical Sennacherib affair, including the corresponding, disparaging speech of the Assyrians and the Syrian (Seleucid) Nicanor.
2. The verb חרה (translated by the LXX as ὀνειδίζω) is central to this biblical Assyrian speech, where it is also associated with the verb גדף (“to revile” or “to blaspheme”).
3. The verb חרה appears in the ancient rabbinic parallels to 1 Macc 7:34 (in conjunction with גדף).
4. The first two verbs employed in 1 Macc 7:34, ἐμυκτήρισεν and κατεγέλασεν, stress the jeer in Nicanor’s speech. This does not correspond to the understanding of חרה, at least as reflected in the LXX but perhaps already in the biblical Sennacherib affair as well.
5. The lexeme חרה may have appeared in two other places in the Hebrew original of the Nicanor story in 1 Macc 7 in reference to both speeches—that of the Assyrians (v. 41) and that of Nicanor (v. 38). The relevant Hebrew lexeme was translated in both instances into Greek with the verb δυσφημέω (“to speak ill of”) and its derivative noun.

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29 Compare the entry “חרה” in Abraham Even-Shoshan, _A New Concordance of the Bible_ (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 401, with HRCS, s.v. “ὄνειδιζεῖν.”
In light of the above, I suggest that, in the sequence of verbs in 1 Macc 7:34, חנף was the third verb in the original Hebrew text.\(^{30}\) If that was the case, why did the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees choose to translate it here with μαίνω?

### III. How Did חנף Become חנף?

Perhaps a slight distortion of the script or a possible misreading led the Greek translator to read חנף instead of חנף in 1 Macc 7:34. Misreadings are, after all, evident in 1 Macc 3:15 (the translator to read the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees would not have sensed sense in the context; (3) the verb carry a digging tool; (2) the LXX uses ῥάσσω as one equivalent for ῥάσσω, and (3) the LXX uses ῥάσσω instead of ῥάσσω.\(^{35}\) We should also remember that in Hebrew nun (ו) and resh (ג) are two of the four letters that comprise the group of liquid consonants (together with lamed and mem; similarly, λ, μ, ν, and ρ in Greek). As such, they are susceptible to phonological in-group interchange, affected by pronunciation rather than script.\(^{35}\)

Notwithstanding the above, an inevitable question arises: is it plausible that the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees would not have sensed חנף to be out of context in 7:34?\(^{36}\) The answer is that perhaps something else suggested to the translator that

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30 Regarding the possible declination of this root in the original Hebrew of verse 34, the Palestinian Talmud version here reads חנף, חנף, that is, the past tense, whereas the integrated recension of the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting reads חנף, חנף, the present tense, and the Hebrew Josippon has חנף (future tense denoting past) (Flusser, Josippon, 1:103).

31 Noted by Rappaport (First Book of Maccabees, 143), crediting Moshe Shwabe and Ezra Z. Melamed with this observation.

32 Noted by Ettelson (Integrity of I Maccabees, 309), crediting Julius Wellhausen.

33 Noted by Bar-Kochva (Judas Maccabaeus, 356), crediting Abraham Kahana.

34 Ibid., 252, crediting Alexander F. Kirkpatrick. For a similar confusion of these two verbs, see the LXX rendering of בֵּית מַעַקְקַקְקָה in Judg 5:14 as ἐξερευνῶντες.

35 Here are but three illustrative examples for the interchange of כ and ע, from the MT and LXX (for additional examples, see Friedrich Delitzsch, Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1920], 112): (1) MT Deut 23:14 reads ככ כ (lit., “your ear”) instead of ככ (your waistband), reflected in the LXX τῆς ζώνης σου, as the place where one should carry a digging tool; (2) the LXX uses θάρσοσ as one equivalent for ῥάσσω (lit., “to dash, mangle to death”), but in MT Jer 23:33 and 39 the Hebrew verb is ῥάσσω (lit., “to abandon”), which makes more sense in the context; (3) the verb ἔρχομαι (to comfort”) occasionally replaces ῥάσσω (lit., “to show mercy”), e.g., in MT Hos 11:8b, or Ezek 24:24a, and vice versa (see LXX Isa 12:1, 52:9, and Zech 1:17). For the interchange of ככ (to assay”) and ככ (to choose), see Aloysius Fitzgerald, “The Interchange of L, N, and ר in Biblical Hebrew,” JBL 97 (1978): 481–88, here 487–88, https://doi.org/10.2307/3265393; Shlomo Naeh, “From the Bible to the Talmud (and Back): Lexical Studies in Hebrew and Aramaic,” in Hebrew through the Ages: In Memory of Shoshana Bahat [Hebrew], ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1997), 133–49, here 136–37. I thank Noam Mizrahi for the latter reference.

36 In the Hebrew Bible, the direct object of the verb חנף is almost exclusively נָעַר (“the land”) and not people (the exception, Dan 11:32, will be discussed below).
the relevant Hebrew verb here was indeed חנף, thus overriding its potential mismatch. That "something" is 1 Macc 1:24b.

1 Maccabees 1:24b and חנף as μιαίνω

Compare 1 Macc 1:24b (concerning Antiochus IV) with 1 Macc 7:34b (concerning Nicanor):

1:24b: καὶ ἐποίησε φονοκτονίαν καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφανίαν μεγάλην
and he caused pollution by bloodshed and spoke in great arrogance

7:34b: καὶ ἐμίανεν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφάνως
and he defiled them and spoke arrogantly

The ending of both verses (underlined) is almost identical: “spoke in great arrogance,” and “spoke arrogantly.” Daniel Schwartz suggests that in verse 1:24b the Hebrew original of φονοκτονία (apparently an innovation of the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees) was a noun form of the root חנף, following Isa 32:6. Indeed, as in 1 Macc 1:24b, in the Isaian verse this noun—describing a villain's deed—is juxtaposed with the villain’s improper (i.e., deceptive) speech (directed against God):

 construção תועה ל׳ ודבר חנף לעשות “("to practice ungodliness, to utter error against the Lord" NKJV). The possibility therefore exists that, in light of his own translation of 1 Macc 1:24b, the translator’s posited misreading in 7:34 was affected, or reinforced, by his impression of חנף + “spoke in arrogance” as a recurring combination in 1 Maccabees in relation to these two key Seleucid rivals to the Hasmoneans, Antiochus IV and Nicanor.

The verb φονοκτονέω is attested prior to Christianity only in LXX Num 35:33 (two occurrences) and LXX Ps 105:38. In all three instances, it has the meaning "to pollute with murder or blood." Since this meaning was clearly extreme and unsupported by the narrative of Nicanor’s confrontation with the elders and the


38 The LXX, however, did not understand חנף in Isa 32:6 as bloodshed but rather as ἄνομα ("lawless acts"). For the various meanings of חנף in the Bible, see Klaus Seybold, "חנף," TDOT 5:36–44. For its meaning in Daniel, see also n. 42 below.

39 See LSJ, s.v. “φονοκτονέω.” LXX Num 35:33: καὶ οὔ μὴ φονοκτονήσητε τὴν γῆν … τὸ γὰρ ἁίμα τὸῦ φονοκτονοῦ τῆν γῆν; compare MT: לא תחניפו את הארץ … כי הדם הוא יחניף את הארץ "You shall not pollute the land … for blood pollutes the land." LXX Ps 105:38: καὶ ἐφονοκτονήθη ἡ γῆ ἐν τοῖς ἁμαρτίαις; compare MT 106:38: "the land was polluted with blood.” Symmachus also used φονοκτονέω to translate the verb חנף in Isa 24:5 (חנף והדם "the land was polluted"); see Frederick Field, Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt: Veterum interpretum graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 2:469.
priests, it appears that the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees chose for 7:34 a verb that denotes defilement in general, namely, μιαίνω.\textsuperscript{40} There are two similar uses of μιαίνω in the LXX as a less-drastic equivalent for חנף in contexts that do not refer to bloodshed. In Jer 3:1, 2, the context is moral defilement of the land by adultery.\textsuperscript{41} Referring to Antiochus IV, Dan 11:32 reads: (יחניף בריית יוניך) (“he will flatter/defile the violators of the covenant”). Those who violate the covenant are Jews who, under the religious persecution launched by the king, were induced to apostatize.\textsuperscript{42} The LXX employed μιαίνω, indicating that the translator understood the verb as referring to the defilement that results from this apostasy from the point of view of Jewish law.

IV. Summary

In the middle of a string of verbs that describe Nicanor’s speech, εμίανεν is, in all likelihood, an error. This is underscored by 1 Macc 7:36, which indicates that the priests were not defiled. First Maccabees 7:36 also refutes the suggestion that Nicanor’s saliva, a source of impurity due to the fact that he was a gentile, defiled the priests. This idea recurs in commentaries on 1 Maccabees, even though it is based on a later, rabbinic tale illustrating the concept of gentile impurity. Yet the concept of gentile impurity is otherwise unfamiliar to 1 Maccabees. Furthermore, the ancient Hebrew versions of the same episode, in Scholion P to the Scroll of Fasting and in the Palestinian Talmud, suggest that the third verb in 1 Macc 7:34 must also have described Nicanor’s disparaging speech.

In light of the dominant role played by the Hebrew verb חרף in the derogatory speech of the Assyrians as part of the biblical Sennacherib affair, which figures in the background of the Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees, and in light of this verb’s appearance in the parallels offered by the Palestinian Talmud and Scholion P to the Scroll of Fasting, as well as the possible occurrence of this lexeme in 1 Macc 7, including an intratextual reference (in v. 38) to verse 34, it would have been only reasonable for this verb to appear in 7:34. None of the other three Greek verbs in this verse apparently represents חרף.

40 Another Greek verb that denotes defilement, μολύνω, is used once in 1 Maccabees in 1:37 in the context of defilement by bloodshed. The LXX used this verb for חנפים in Jer 23:11.

41 The same notion is repeated in Jer 3:9, but the relevant part of the verse is absent from the LXX. For variant ancient Greek translations that use φονοκτονέω in this verse, see Joseph Ziegler, Ieremiae, SVTG 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1957), 162.

42 Indeed, Theodotion’s Greek translation has the verb ἐπάγω (“to induce/seduce”) here. This verse from Daniel, therefore, may represent the semantic development of חנף, acquiring the sense of “to flatter.” See David Flusser, “Some of the Precepts of the Torah from Qumran (4QMMT) and the Benediction against the Heretics” [Hebrew], Tarbiz 61 (1992): 333–74, here 342.
I contend, therefore, that, in the original Hebrew, the third verb in 1 Macc 7:34 was חדבר, read by the Greek translator as חנף. In addition to the possibility of yet another innocent slight misreading on the part of this translator, or, perhaps, a phonological in-group interchange of consonants, reading חנף in this position falls in line with the translator’s understanding and treatment of a similar textual combination in 1 Macc 1:24b. Here, as suggested by Schwartz, the translator employed φονοκτονία for the nominal form of חנף. The verb φονοκτονέω, in the sense of “to pollute with murder or blood,” was clearly too severe in the context of Nicanor’s confrontation with the elders and the priests. Consequently, the Greek translator sought a semantically proximal verb on the same spectrum and opted for μιαίνω, which he employed on four additional occasions where it clearly refers to actual (i.e., nonverbal) defilement.